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## Creative Expression Through Poetic Language

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EMERSON says, "Because the soul is progressive, it never quite repeats itself, but in every act attempts the production of a new and fairer whole." Whatever gives a new aspect to something is creative. Creative expression is one of the chief objectives of progressive schools.

It is the purpose of this paper to treat the creative in the field of poetic expression in the lower elementary grades. Because the child is poetic before he is prosaic, he should be given every opportunity to express his poetic feelings. An environment of freedom gives opportunity for the rich creative development of the individual; this environment is of vital importance in stimulating his creative spirit.

The teacher's part in this development is to put the child in contact with beauty, and guide his sensitiveness to the beautiful; to provide a literary background which will enable him to express himself; and to arrange situations that he may have experiences from which his expression may flow. She must appreciate beauty that she may guide the child's power to see it. When a second grade class was enjoying fringed gentians they created these verses:

Pretty blue gentian,  
Blue as the sky,  
We love your blue hair  
And your little gold eye.

Blue gentian, blue gentian,  
In a little vase,  
O, how pretty you are,  
I love your blue face.

Blue gentians,  
Waiting for the sun,  
Do not sleep all day,  
Come out and play.

These experiences led to the child's appreciation of beauty outside of school. During morning exercises a child remarked, "Last night I saw buttercups nodding their heads, saying 'Good night' to me." Another said, "Yesterday I saw a tall white pine reaching up to the sky." A third contributed, "Sunday when I was riding, the trees were so pretty with the sun shining through the leaves."

To provide a literary background, the teacher read to the class much poetry of various types, both that which children have created, and the classics, which they enjoyed with a child's understanding. Their love and appreciation of poetry are essential factors of the development of their literary back-

ground.

To help the child to have at his command fitting words, the teacher printed on attractive charts beautiful expressions of poets and authors. She said, "This is the beautiful way that Mr. Bryant tells us about the robin's song." The children found in books and magazines beautiful words and phrases which the teacher listed on charts for the children's use when needed.

Developing the imagination is an important part of the background for the creative. The responses to various experiences show how this was satisfactorily accomplished. When children were watching falling leaves they fancied they looked like airplanes sailing by, ships floating along, or fairies dancing. When they were watching snow falling they fancied they saw fairies chasing each other, fairies dancing, feathers falling from the sky.

They interpreted birds' songs as, "I love the blue sky," and "I love the secret in my nest."

In their imaginations, the wind said to them, "Swish, swish, swish," "O-o, o-o, o-o," "Rock-a-by baby." Walking under a pine tree they expressed the experience in similes. "Pine needles feel like a soft, soft carpet under my feet." "They feel soft and smooth like velvet." When they talked to inanimate things, their imaginations created little pictures. "Dandelion, you look like gold." "Do you get your gold from the sunshine?" "Your sunshine is beautiful in the green grass." "Rain, what are you saying to me?" "I like to watch you spatter on my window." "Do you want to come into my room?"

Beautiful thoughts are stimulated by all of this experience; from this background beautiful imagery and lovely cadenced expression may flow. The following verses were created by second grade children when in their class room watching a shower:

Dear raindrops, dear raindrops,  
When you drop, what do you say?  
I should like to know.

Gray sky, gray sky,  
Why do you make it rain?  
My clouds are too full of water,  
That's why I make it rain.

I woke very early,  
The rain was pouring down.  
It said, "Good morning" to me;  
The sun-showers came  
And made a rainbow.

When they were watching the first snowfall  
a child stood at the window and said,

Pretty white snowflakes will fall on the streets,  
Children will slide down the hills,  
Snowflakes will fall on our little red sleds,  
And our mittens will get wet and cold.

An afternoon excursion to a park provided vivid experiences which inspired a first and second grade class to express themselves rhythmically in these verses:

Buttercups, nodding your yellow heads,  
Are you listening to little songs in the ground?

A buttercup, standing under a tree,  
Waved her little green hands to me.

#### THE RIVER

Water, sparkling all around,  
When sparkling, it's smiling at me,  
When it smiles it is like a garden  
With silver flowers shining in the sun.

Dancing diamonds, dancing diamonds,  
The sun is making you grow.

Ripples are coming from the river to the shore,  
When they come along they bring many more.

#### THE AIRPLANE

Airplane airplane,  
Flying along the sky,  
Take me with you,  
"Good by, good by."

How I wish I could go to Fairyland  
Up in the airplane so high;  
I would watch the pretty little fairies  
Dance on the clouds in the blue sky.

A second grade lay on the lawn one warm June afternoon and fancied charming little pictures.

#### LISTENING ON OUR LAWN

I put my little head  
Down on the lawn;  
I heard grasshoppers  
Hopping along.

The fairies were dancing  
Softly on their toes.

I saw fairies in the grass  
Lying down asleep;  
When they awoke  
They were so glad  
They ran around the tree  
And sang.

All of this expression was oral; the teacher recorded in a notebook the children's thoughts when expressed. These she copied later on the blackboard for class appreciation and wholesome criticism. Each child made a copy of his contribution on paper which he used in his individual book to which he gave a title, "My Beautiful Thoughts," "My Treasure Box," or "My Golden Verses." These books were sent along with the class at promotion. The verses were also used in class books relating to units of work—nature study and social studies. Each printed his verse with rubber stamps in a book which the class entitled, "Our Golden Verses." This book was placed upon our library table.

Rhythm comes naturally; through the ages every race has expressed itself rhythmically. The teacher leads the children to see that repeating a word or phrase often makes the stanza sound better, and that the phrase may be prettier if words are in a different position from the way we talk: garden, fair, dresses, yellow and gold. When hearing insects or birds, repeat what they say: "Buzz, buzz, buzz," "Chirp, chirp, chirp," which expression may be directed to buzzing bees and chirping birds. Children delight to play with

the sounds of words and receive much satisfaction from hearing themselves repeat them in sing-song fashion.

Not much rhyme will come naturally in grades one and two, except with a child who has the gift of fluent expression. Some will create simple couplets, "tree" rhyming with "me," and the like. In creating rhymes the thought becomes focused upon finding rhyming words which may defeat our purpose; it hinders the expression of the child's thought and feeling.

We created a long poem about "Our Garden," although we do not often make a long rhyme. We were living wonderful experiences in a garden all our own and we thought that an invitation in rhyme to our principal would be delightful, and would moreover make "Our Garden" book more attractive. Anticipating these verses the teacher listed on the board, as given by individuals, "What We Like in Our Garden"; the buzzing bees, the waving trees, the singing birds.

We noticed that there is repetition in many verses so we decided to begin each stanza in the same way. After deciding upon the opening lines, the teacher wrote them several times on the blackboard. We finished each stanza using the children's thoughts. We talked about what words rhymed and how some lines sounded better with more words and others with fewer. The result was:

#### OUR GARDEN

Come to our garden today with me,  
It is a beautiful spot to see,  
The rich brown earth smells, oh, so sweet,  
And it is soft beneath our feet.

Come to our garden today with me,  
It is a beautiful spot to see,  
Robins are singing in the tall, tall tree,  
"Cheer up, cheer up, chee, chee, chee".

Come to our garden today with me,  
It is a beautiful spot to see,  
Bees are singing their buzzing song  
As they fly so fast along.

# The Turned-Into-Outs

A POEM BY A SECOND GRADE

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MANY articles are being written concerning the place of poetry in the lives of small children. Appreciation, memorization, and the writing of poetry are being stressed and strongly urged by teachers and educators. Teachers can create the atmosphere essential for greater appreciation and can simplify and make easy the memorization of delightful and worthwhile poems, but to what extent can they bring about the production of worthwhile poems by the children themselves?

In following suggestions made by educators concerning the writing of poetry by children, particularly smaller children, aren't we elementary teachers labeling as poetry that which is little more than common-place ideas written in jingle form and put together in verses, or smooth-flowing ideas put into blank verse form? Do we get a poor imitation of Mother Goose? Or do we, more often, get poems having the fanciful ideas, the rhythm, the swing and flow of musical words of a Rose Fyleman, a Christina Rossetti, or a Walter De la Mare?

Over a period of ten years I have been teaching poetry to children of primary grades. Each year my children have come to love poetry, asking for it and begging for it much as they tease their parents for stories, candy and pennies. Day after day, and several times each day, comes the request, "If we get our arithmetic (spelling, writing, or the changing of gym shoes—whatever it may be) done quickly, may we have some poems before our next class?" And yet with all this appreciation and desire for poetry I have had very little real poetry from the children, either collectively or individually. I have had many good imitations of Mother

Goose form, but such were merely the outgrowths of ear-training work correlated with reading and health subject-matter. Several times I have had two or three stanzas of poetry, each of four rhyming or alternate rhyming lines; all of them have been rather ordinary, nothing really poetical in idea or in form. Dozens of times the background has been there; the appreciation and the physical setting conducive to the writing of poetry worked out, and yet I failed to get desirable and really creative results from the children. (I sincerely believe that if the majority of teachers reading this article will be thoroughly honest with themselves in reviewing their work with their children, they will find that they have had the same experience.) We stimulate the interest of the group, we arrange desirable settings, we motivate for appreciation, and yet we are not successful in getting good poetry from the children. What is it which is missing? Can teachers do still more to get poetical expression from children?

I believe that the thing which is needed, which is lacking in children, is that something which, for want of a better term, is called "mood." How often we adults speak of "being in the mood" to do so and so, or "not being in the mood to do it." When the artist, the writer, the poet is "in the mood" how he can work, and with what satisfying results! And if he isn't "in the mood" how impossible to do anything worthwhile! Mood seems to be a combination of outside circumstances conducive to production and of inward urge to give expression to that which seeks expression. In working with children we teachers have had the outside setting arranged time after time, but the



inspired inward urge for expressing himself has not been simultaneous with this setting prepared for the child. The result has been inferior expression on his part because he was forcing himself to give to the teacher or the group that which he was expected to give as his share of school work.

I have reached the above conclusions after giving careful consideration to the way in which the poem, "The Turn-Into-Outs", came to be produced by my children a few weeks ago. How did I happen to get this quality of work from the children this time when I had not done so in the past? Has it been due to the inferior groups of children? I believe not. Is it my fault, in spite of the fact that I have tried to use the best of method in poetry work? I believe the question can be answered best by telling how this poem came to be written.

I am sure that many teachers who have not been getting good poetry from their children in the past will be surprised at the desirable results if they are willing to adapt their school programs to the true mood of the children. I can almost hear the majority of teachers reading this say, "But I *do* adapt my work to the interests of the child!" Perhaps you do, when the interests of the child coincide with what you have tentatively planned in your mind as a unit of work. But if his contribution is not directly in line with the planned piece of work, you subtly turn his idea toward your goal so that he may still be happy and you may get on to the piece of work which you had planned to do at that time. What we teachers really need is to have still keener insight, more discernment.

I can claim very little credit for the following poem, because it came spontaneously from the children and I wrote it down on the board as they told me. But what if I had not taken it from them *when they wanted to give it*? What if I had said, "But it is time to do something else," or "We'll do that later because I have something else for us to do now"?

Once there was a little egg  
Who turned into a worm.  
He scampered on the limbs of trees  
And in among the cherry leaves  
And thought he'd make a home.

He wove a little silky bed,  
He made a pillow for his head;  
He snuggled in it tight and warm  
And there he slept through all the storm.  
You'd think that he was dead.

All winter long he slept so sound  
In his cocoon wrapped round and round;  
In spring he was a butterfly  
He spread his wings way out to dry  
And flew down to the ground.

The following is the story of the writing of the poem:

It was a very gloomy and dismal March afternoon. A cold rain had been falling steadily for several days. Outdoor recess was impossible. The children had been playing seat-changing games for exercise and relaxation. One boy in a front seat said, "There's a new book on your desk which someone brought. Can we have a story?" (It had become custom for the children to bring from home their books which they enjoyed and to share them with others in the room. Sometimes the books were put on the book table in the rear of the room, sometimes on the teacher's desk. This particular book had escaped notice by the teacher. It had attracted the boy because of the red band along the gray back and the attractive little picture in the center of the cover. It looked inviting, interesting to him.) The critic said that there would be time for a story. The children did not know that the critic had previously outlined a piece of work for a student-teacher to observe, and that she was only too glad to fill in the remaining few minutes before this teacher could arrive from her college class to observe the model lesson, by giving to the children something for which they had asked, instead of suggesting something for them to do.

The teacher held up the attractive book, read the title, *THE TURNED-INTO-OUTS* by Elizabeth Gordon, and asked, "What do you sup-

pose this book could be about? **THE TURNED-INTOS!** Isn't that a queer and interesting title?" Of course this aroused the interest and wonderment of the children. They made several suggestions about the contents and then demanded a story from the book.

The book is delightful. The story is about a little girl who discovers darling little fairy folk in her garden. They tell her that she did not like them before they turned into what they are now. She is puzzled and doesn't understand. They tell her that they belong to the order of the Turned-Intos, who are things which turn into other things. Nature study facts are told in a delightful manner, each chapter dealing with a Turned-Into. She learns about an egg which turned into a caterpillar, which turned into a butterfly; a grubby worm which turned into a June bug; the worm which turned into a katydid. And of course the listening children were fascinated by facts told in so fanciful a manner.

On that rainy March afternoon the first chapter was just finished as the student teacher arrived. The critic put a marker in the place with the following motivating remark for the next chapter, "The next chapter says 'The June Bug Twins.' What do you suppose that has to do with Turned-Intos?"

While the teacher was walking across the front of the room to put away the book and pick up the materials for the next lesson, the children guessed what the next part of the story might be about. One child piped up, "Miss L—, can't we make a poem? I've got an idea for one." What was the thing to do? There was a carefully planned lesson ready to be taught, stressing for the observing teacher certain essential points which she needed to get and understand before she could start on her practice-teaching. How many times we have been in a similar situation! And how many times we have said, "That's fine. You remember it, and we will come back to that in a little while." Instead, the answer was, "What is your idea?" The teacher really had in mind to write the idea on the board and say that they would come

back to it later after the demonstration lesson. The child stood up and gave the first stanza of the poem exactly as it is now printed. It came from that child spontaneously; as smooth-flowing, rhythmical, and as steadily and unhesitatingly as water flowing from a spring. The accommodating and pleasantly interested teacher of a minute ago, who was giving the children a chance to express themselves before directing their interests toward the work which she had planned, was more than surprised. She was startled, almost dumbfounded! Still keeping the book in her hand, she whirled around to the board and reached for a piece of chalk, saying, "My goodness, what a lovely idea. Please don't forget one bit of it while I write it down as fast as I can."

While she said that there flashed through her mind the different styles of poetry; what was good form, what was poor form; what was proper indentation for certain forms; what was the approved number of lines for certain forms and styles. She recalled that a five line stanza was not highly approved of by critics of poetry, but the five line form seemed to be the only form which fitted the rhythmical thought which the child had just given. She feared that the beauty of the thing might be spoiled if it were revised, so she wrote it down in the form which seemed to suit the thought.

The entire room was thrilled with the verse. Someone else spoke up at once, "I've got something which would go next." Thus came the first and second lines of the second stanza. The teacher then asked them to read to themselves the first two lines of the first stanza and the first two lines of the second to see if they "swung along" just alike. The children decided that they did. Next, the teacher told them that the rhythm of lines in each stanza in the same poem had to correspond, and that the next part of their idea for the poem had to "swing along" exactly like lines three, four, and five of the first part. She read the seven lines of the poem aloud, and when she came to the place for

# What Is Childhood's Native Language?

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**F**REEDOM'S voice is again being heard in our land, this time lifted in the cause of creative expression. Many well-known writers are pleading for childhood's chance to express itself, unhampered by the restraint placed upon it by adult interference. In one of his late books<sup>1</sup> Hughes Mearns devotes an entire chapter to "The Native Language of Childhood" in which he describes and deplores the tendency of parents and teachers to superimpose their ideals of expression upon the child, thereby smothering his naturally beautiful thoughts even before they have been given verbal birth.

Mr. Mearns says that the child's earliest speech is an attempt at the language of literature. "Occasional flashes of achievement" come "during those early months and years" and the mother is quick to detect them. She soon learns to be reticent about her child's ability, however; experience has taught her that others do not regard it as she does. Mr. Mearns believes that there is a natural adult antagonism against, or a sad lack of understanding of childhood's native language.

This antagonism is apt to produce one of three results in the child. A feeling of shyness may cause him to address his remarks privately to a toy, he may retire into a dream-life in which he holds silent self-communion, or his "gift of language" may seem to die out and to be forever lost.

An international recognition of the child's native ability to express himself in beautiful, rhythmical language has lately come into being, Mr. Mearns says, and mothers are imbued with a new courage as the result of this wide-spread interest. He feels that this

free expression reveals the child's real self and that by keeping a careful record of these early remarks the mother is storing up material with which she may renew in her child a self-faith after doubt has produced a wavering in his consciousness.

Because adults have so standardized their ideals Mr. Mearns believes that they have lost the artistic sense and so are unable to recognize the art in a child's free, natural expression. He thinks that it is folly to try to teach language to children. This teaching leads to an adult imitation which falls far short of the beauty to be found in natural child-expression.

The writer's own experience in children's creative writing has been interesting. While she cannot agree with Mr. Mearns in all that he says, she feels that children are hampered by a fear of ridicule from the tongues of their elders. She recalls an effort to become better acquainted with the members of her fourth grade. The children were requested to write what they would ask for if a fairy promised to grant them a single wish. They were also asked to write what they thought their teacher would wish for under similar conditions. Their own wishes were colored by a desire to please the reader, while their real preferences were expressed by what they thought their teacher would ask for. One little girl believed that her teacher would wish for a baby. When privately questioned the next day as to why she thought so the child was so covered with confusion that it was very evident that she had told about her work at home and had been laughed at. At her teacher's assurance that it was a beautiful wish and that she wondered how the little girl had thought of it, the little face cleared

<sup>1</sup>Mearns, Hughes. CREATIVE POWER, New York. Doubleday, Doran, 1929.

up and the answer came, "Why, I would like one."

The children in the class referred to in the preceding paragraph were almost entirely of foreign parentage. In most of the homes no English was spoken and the work in literature was rather difficult to cope with. Interest in composition seemed to lag, so one day the teacher suggested that a play be written. This suggestion produced an electrifying effect upon the class in general and an enthusiasm in certain members of lower mentality that was most gratifying. As summer was approaching the circus was decided upon as a fitting subject about which plays could be written.

Three vocabularies were developed: the first was composed of the names of circus animals, the second of circus people, and the third was a miscellaneous collection which included properties and the various other things found about the grounds.

Interest ran high, little fingers literally itched to get at the business of play-writing. The form was discussed and books of plays were made available. (This class was in a traditional school and there was no children's library in the building.) Of their own accord several children made use of the public library to bring in books of plays so that the form might be studied.

Charming little plays were written. The variety of ways in which the subject was handled was great; families preparing to attend the circus and groups watching the parade were written about, but the most popular was the personification of the animals. A sympathetic understanding of the demands made upon these dumb entertainers was shown in the compositions. The children realized that hours of practise preceded the perfection of the performance and they gave to the animals a sense of responsibility that human actors might well emulate.

The reactions of a few individuals to the suggestion of writing a play may be cited here. A little Spanish girl of the lowest, or

Z intelligence group, in whose home no English was spoken, had always had great difficulty in creative work in English. She conscientiously tried to write, but the results were most unsatisfactory both to herself and to her teacher. The thought of writing a play seemed to make an especially strong appeal to her. She could not wait to begin; she worked at home, bringing in a composition that would have done credit to one of a higher mentality and a more fortunate environment.

Over-emphasized parent guidance showed its influence in the case of a little girl in the medium, or Y intelligence group. She was an only child. Her mother brought her to school every morning and noon and called for her at the close of each session. The English language was used in the home and her written work had always been fairly good. She made hard work of writing a play, however; she seemed to feel a restraint; she was unable to let her self go as did her little Spanish classmate. She was given plenty of time and she wrote a little play that showed a pleasing richness of imagination. Her home habits had undoubtedly robbed her of the freedom which was her natural right and caused her a great deal of difficulty in a task which should have proved easy for her to do.

Mr. Mearns speaks of the rhythmic quality of children's expressions. The writer has not found that quality predominating among the children with whom she has worked and this lack did not seem to be the result of adult influence. Is it not reasonable to suppose that there may be a marked individual difference along that line among children as well as among adults?

Rather than adopt a strictly "hands off" policy regarding the guidance of children in their creative work, it would seem well to plead for a more sympathetic understanding between parent and child or between teacher and child so that direction might be given where needed without destroying the natural beauty of child expression.



# Poetry Writing in the Grades

DOROTHY ANNE KINSEY

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I QUOTED to my class the other day,  
"Two men looked through prison bars;  
One saw mud, the other, stars."  
A little girl remarked gravely, "That second man was a poet."

I could have told her that she was a poet, too. Almost all children have beautiful, original, fancies which should be expressed, and these ideas can best be vitalized through the medium of poetry. It is not always the best student, or the child with the most desirable home background, who writes the best poetry. Some of the finest work done in my class was that of C and D students whose parents are foreign laborers. Almost every child has imaginative potentialities which, with molding and guidance, can find their outlet in true poetry.

For many weeks before my sixth graders tried writing any poetry, I read them all the verse I had time for. I chose modern works in most cases, and frequently read again the ones they liked the most. The Untermeyer collection, *THIS SINGING WORLD*, is ideal for this, since it includes several of almost every kind of poem, no matter how classified.

We discussed the selections I read for: first, the story, if any, or the general idea in the author's mind; second, the "mind-pictures," and the "words that make you see them"; third, the rhythm, noting that different kinds of poems had different music; and fourth, explanation of any words or phrases whose non-comprehension prevented the child's enjoyment of the poem. I say "enjoyment" rather than "understanding," because it is inevitable that many poems will contain words and allusions whose meaning is nothing, but whose sound as used in the line keeps unmarred the rhythmic idea which

forms in the child's mind as he listens. How many of those adults who thrill to the delirious music of "The Raven" can explain the meaning of "the Night's Plutonian shore"?

We then decided that a good poem must have a new idea or a new story to tell, and this must be told in an original way, using "picture-words" to make the reader "see" the writer's thought.

Form is secondary in children's poetry-writing. Rhyme should be discouraged rather than stressed, as it seriously hampers free expression. Before the class started writing poetry, I placed on the board Carl Sandburg's "Fog," to give the children a little idea of what their work should look like, but I told them to write down their thought the easiest way first, and I would help them arrange their lines. I found they needed surprisingly little assistance.

It seems better not to suggest subjects for poems, unless the child seems at a loss. Then a little tactful questioning will generally call to his mind something in his own life that he would like to write about. The teacher should insist, however, on concrete subjects. Verses on "Spring" and "Our Country" are sure to be vapid.

This one was suggested by a cover on the *SATURDAY EVENING POST*.

## THE PIRATE

The arms that grip the wheel are like iron bars,  
The stolen silk around his head is red and white.  
The large dark eyes are peering  
Toward the little island where his treasure lies  
buried—

Emeralds,  
Rubies,  
Diamonds,

Gold, and  
Silk—

In a great golden chest.

"Dusk," below, I quote for its perfect rhythm and colorful imagery, although the fourth line is spoiled by straining for a rhyme, and the metaphor in the second stanza is slightly mixed.

DUSK

Do you look at the sky when it's dusk time?  
Do you see all the lights around?  
Don't you like it better than night time,  
I do, it's so safe and sound.

Let's pretend that the sky is a silvery sea,  
The lights all ships of gold.  
They are all coming home in the dusk time,  
Coming home like the knights of old.

The next two show how children let their imaginations play upon the beauty and mystery of their natural environment. It is easily seen which is a boy's thought, and which a girl's.

THE MOON'S SHIPWRECK

Aye! One night the gallant moon sailed the  
cloudy sea.  
But it didn't come back, as you may think, for  
It had a wreck—  
A wreck with the great North Star.  
At first one piece came in,  
Then another piece, till finally  
The last piece floated back.  
When they got all the pieces together  
They built it up again.  
The sun worked at night,  
The stars worked in the day,  
Until they had it all built up again  
To sail the cloudy seas.

THE STAR

The star! what is it?  
Some say it is a candle,  
Maybe lost from some careless dream.  
Others say it may be a jewel  
Dropped from some fairy ruler's wand.  
Or maybe it is a light.  
It might be from the house of some good fairy,  
Wishing all well.  
The star! which of all these things  
Do children think it is?

Now a little philosophy. Note the restraint in the pointing of the moral.

THE GERANIUM

The Geranium has its green leaves.  
When it doesn't get its water it will die,  
When it does it will grow.  
If we don't get our food and drink we will die.  
When the geranium has grown to its size  
It will have its flower.

Children seldom write good humorous poetry, but occasionally something like this comes from an especially keen pupil.

TO MY ALARM CLOCK

Tinkle, tinkle, little bell!  
How I wish you were in—well,  
Any place but where you are,  
China wouldn't be too far.

Now you wake me in the cold,  
But just you wait till I am old.  
Ah! Revenge will sure be mine.  
I'll set you then for half-past-nine!

The influence of keen interest in geography is seen in

AFRICA

In Africa everything is still.  
The tigers creep on their soft paws,  
Every now and then you can hear a twig crack.  
In Africa everything is still.

In African village everyone scurries.  
The men are getting ready to go hunting,  
The babies laugh at monkeys in the tree-tops,  
Then—  
In Africa everything is still.

I have saved for the last what I consider the prize of my collection. The factory is a part of the boy-author's life, and he personifies it in straight-chiselled lines that McKnight Black might not be ashamed to have written.

THE FACTORY

All day long the factory buzzes,  
It buzzes like a bee but louder,  
And sometimes it gets mad and shrieks.  
But the workmen don't mind.  
They grin and talk all day.  
When night comes it gets angry and gives a  
loud shriek  
Because it wants to sleep.

# Poetry in a Fifth Grade

CLEO RAINWATER

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WHY children write poetry and how they write it make an intensely interesting psychological study. One is thoroughly convinced that they are inspired, for they work hard and fast to put down their thoughts and willingly look up words to get those that will "fit" the rhythm or will rhyme. They are really lifted out of themselves and for the time, at least, possess a spark of the divine as can easily be seen by those who have watched a child put down his thoughts and observed him immediately after.

My fifth grade had such an interesting time last year with the writing of poetry, that some of its experiences may be of interest to teachers of other fifth grades.

The first poem written was due to a bit of borrowing on the part of the second grade. The children were in the midst of an interesting discussion of butterfly wings. They had learned much about the ways of insects and were keenly appreciative of the lovely colors. In the midst of this discussion two second grade children entered and explained they wished to borrow a picture of a rainbow. They were studying rainbows and wished to know the order of the colors. A child was told to get a certain book that would help them. Then another child went at once to the nature table, took a card from a stack, brought it back and handed it to them. On the card was a picture of a rainbow in very good colors with the explanation of the phenomenon. The second grade children took the picture with proper appreciation and went out. "A serious interruption," perhaps you will say. Instead, it resulted in a beautiful thing. One fifth grader asked, "How do the colors come?" Another answered his question.

Then came a discussion of rainbows, the cause and time of appearance, but the child who had found the picture seemingly heard none of this. She had dropped into her desk and was writing rapidly. She was not interrupted by being called back to what was going on. One could see by her attitude she was writing something very important. In five minutes time she looked up and with a smile said, "I have written a poem about the rainbow." On being asked, "Would you like to read it to us?" this is what she read:

## THE RAINBOW

The rainbow arches up so high,  
It matches with the light blue sky,  
The fairies have it for a bridge,  
And walk along its colored ridge.  
It looks like flowers mixed together,  
But it only comes in rainy weather.

A very pretty climax for all we had been saying. The fact that we were discussing something as aesthetic as butterfly wings made the children more susceptible to the beauty of the rainbow and they exclaimed with genuine delight over the poem. They asked that she be allowed to go read it to the second grade which she did at once.

This was not the only time we were inspired by this same second grade. Three days later a group of children came to read to us some poems they had written about rainbows. The children were genuinely delighted with these poems. Immediately after their departure the first grade teacher entered with a little framed picture of a fairy with iridescent wings and said, "I knew you were studying butterflies so I thought you would enjoy my fairy because the wings are very much like butterfly wings."

When she left the children were told, "We really should be very happy, don't you think? So many people are thinking of us and doing things for us." One child said, "The second grade has done so much for us, let's do something for them." Others joined in. The reply was, "That's a lovely idea. What shall we do?"

One child suggested we get up a play for them, but this was ruled out because, as a child expressed it, "They wouldn't enjoy a play we would get up; they wouldn't understand it." One or two other suggestions were given but rejected by the class. Then one volunteered, "Let's write a poem." The faces of all lighted up but one said, "What shall we write about?"

It was suggested, "These children wrote poems about what they have been studying. Have you been studying anything about which you could write?" Immediately one child said, "Butterflies." Then another gave the first couplet of the poem below. After that they came so thick and fast it was difficult to write them on the board without losing parts. When the butterfly poem was finished one suggested that we tell the life history of the butterfly in poetry. Another said, "Let's make it a new poem then, for that one sounds finished." The lines then came for the poem entitled "The Moth," many children contributing. When both were written, a little brushing up was done. A child would say, "That doesn't just fit there," meaning the rhythm was not smooth. Another would perhaps give the word. Certain words were changed for vividness. When they were satisfied with it the titles were decided upon. They had just learned the word *gauzy*, consequently it must be in the title as well as the poem about the butterfly. On re-reading the last poem one child said, "That's not the life history of a butterfly; they don't spin cocoons; that's a moth." So, it was named.

#### THE GAUZY BUTTERFLY

Butterfly, butterfly, on gauzy wing,  
You come to us in the lovely spring  
; Sipping nectar from the flowers  
That grow beneath the April showers.

Butterfly, butterfly, you fly so high,  
Your colors shine against the sky,  
You flit around in the sunshine bright  
And fold your wings away at night.  
When at night you go away,  
I always wonder where you stay.

#### THE MOTH

First I am a little egg,  
Lying on a flower;  
Next I am a caterpillar  
Looking for a bower.

Then I start to make my bed,  
I weave and weave and nod my head,  
I sleep and sleep from fall till spring,  
And people think I'm a little dead thing.

When I wake again in the spring  
I am such a lovely thing.

The children were thoroughly saturated with the subject and keenly appreciative of it. When the inspiration came at the psychological moment in the study—interest was still high—it came from a desire to reciprocate a courtesy which appealed to all.

The next inspiration came from the study of King Arthur. The grade read, as a group, Maude Radford Warren's edition. In addition to this, five other editions were read by individuals and parts of Tennyson's *IDYLLS OF THE KING* were read aloud to them after the story had been discussed. The first three poems below were written by three different children after "How Arthur Became King" had been read and discussed by the children. The next was inspired, of course, by "The Finding of Excalibur." The children were told in the introduction to the stories that there are many different books about King Arthur and some people have written these same stories in poetry form. The child who wrote the poem entitled "Lady of the Lake" said, "I'm going to put each story into a poem." "King Arthur's Sword" is also hers. She was not encouraged except in a casual way to do this because she put so much into her poems when she wrote we did not wish



to over-stimulate her. A lovelier sight than this child, as she wrote "Lady of the Lake" would be difficult to find. She has a keen sense of rhythm and a love for beautiful words not often found in a fifth grade child.

#### KING ARTHUR'S SWORD

King Arthur pulled it from the stone,  
And they made him king upon the throne.  
He was a hero of the land,  
He pulled the sword with skillful hand.  
So every knight, lord and slave  
Loved King Arthur, true and brave.

#### KING ARTHUR

King Arthur was gentle, brave and fine,  
He punished the sinners and honored the kind.  
He was sometimes solemn and sometimes not.  
He was always good and made not a plot.  
All of these was Good King Arthur.

#### KING ARTHUR IN THE BEAUTIFUL FOREST

Arthur loved to lie and gaze at the deep  
blue sky,  
And sometimes look at the little squirrels,  
And then gaze on into the big world.

Sometimes a thoughtful mother deer  
Would come along, shy with fear,  
And a flock of pheasants would rise  
From the bushes around him near.

#### LADY OF THE LAKE

As Arthur journeyed onward  
He came into a wood  
Where amidst the fragrant flowers  
A great lake stood.  
It was quiet and beautiful  
Back beneath the trees  
Which seemed to whisper  
Among the summer breeze.  
Arthur saw upon the bank  
Three lovely faces fair,  
And beneath the sunshine  
Their floating golden hair.  
But just behind the mist,  
As they peered through,  
A lovely lady glided,  
Light as the dew.  
The foam around her shoulders  
Sparkled, shone, and gleamed  
Like colors of the rainbow,

So delicate it seemed.  
And Arthur asked him softly,  
"Merlin, who is she?"  
He answered, "Lady of the Lake,  
Can't you see?"  
Arthur looked and saw,  
Rising up so light,  
An arm and hand  
Clothed in lovely white.  
In the hand a brilliant sword  
Dazzled in the sun.  
Arthur said he wanted it  
Because he had none.  
He jumped into a boat  
And rowed to the hand,  
Took up the sword  
And rowed proudly  
Back to land.

"Commander Byrd" was written by a child who was collecting all she could find about the Commander, and making a scrap book. It needs no explanation. Children at this age are extremely fond of heroes and may frequently be inspired to write poems about them as this and the King Arthur poems show.

#### COMMANDER BYRD

Commander Byrd, my hero brave!  
A South Pole flight he made  
With all his furnishings, food and crew,  
And with his little dog, Igloo.

Over hills and ice and snow he fled,  
The hours passed by but on he sped,  
And with his airplane slowing down  
He struck the cold and icy ground.

The South Pole! he had reached it there,  
Shouts of joy then filled the air.  
He's the man we can't forget,  
Commander Byrd, the hero yet.

The last poem was written by a boy and shows a delightful sense of humor. The children had been reading THE POETRY BOOKS. They asked if they might each select a poem to read aloud. The boy who wrote these thought the poem selected by another boy very, very funny—so funny that he wrote "The Chewing Gum Man" as an outlet.

#### THE CHEWING GUM MAN

Dar was an old man who sold chewing gum,  
He chewed it all himself—

He neber had none.  
 He chewed a hunk oné day and put it on  
 the floor,  
 He stepped right in the middle  
 And neber got up no more.

As these fifth grade children were studied throughout the year and observed in their work, it became evident that the writing of poetry was usually the result of an intensive

study. It served as an outlet, a safety valve for the emotions; it epitomized the highest type of emotional reaction toward that particular subject and came spontaneously. It indicates depth of feeling we do not often attribute to children so young and shows the quality of material with which the teacher has to work.

### THE TURNED-INTO-OUTS

(Continued from page 32)

lines eight, nine and ten, she said in the rhythm of lines three, four, and five, "Ta-ta, ta-ta, ta-ta, ta-ta! Twist your next idea so it will swing along like that."

After many re-readings by the children and ta-tas by the teacher, the ideas contributed by the children, and criticized and changed by them, were worked into the resulting poem, the teacher giving the rhythm and accent when necessary, but making no suggestion as to wording and ideas used except to say, "Twist it around some other way," or "What are some other rhyming words?" The only place where the teacher did more than make the above suggestions was in the wording of the last line in the second stanza, and that was done after the entire poem had been written. The children had the line start "You would", instead of "You'd." They said that that part did not swing along just right, but they could think of no way to change it and still not spoil the ideas. The teacher asked, "What about the quick way of saying 'You would'?" The children got the idea at once, because the contractions I'm, you're, and others, had been presented to them in their reading work as the quick ways of saying I am, and you are. Thus the last dissatisfaction with their work was smoothed away.

There had been no suggestion about a title so the teacher casually said "What are you going to call this poem?" Several children

suggested "The Turn-Into" because of the title of the book. Then one little boy said, "Put *Out* on the end of it." The teacher asked why he wanted that, and the reply was, "Oh, the story's kinda different. It's got queer ideas in it so the poem ought to have a queer title. Besides, they turn into something and turn out into something else." And with this the poem, "The Turn-Into-Outs," was completed, but not so the demonstration lesson!

What if the child who said she had an idea for a poem had been told, "We don't have time for it now"; "I have something else planned for you to do which I am sure you will enjoy"; "This isn't the time for poetry!" Would the idea and inspiration which started the poem and kept it going until it was finished have survived the different ideas which the teacher would have introduced in her planned lesson? Could the "mood"—the outward circumstances and the inward urge for expression coming simultaneously, be recaptured and made to function as delightfully and spontaneously as it did when taken at its first impulse? I believe not. If we teachers become more sensitive to the creative moods of children and are willing to readjust our carefully planned daily school work to the true moods of the children, we may succeed in getting more genuine artistic expression from them.

# Notes on a Lesson in the Appreciation of Poetry\*

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I CAME into this room for the first time today with five books, all full of lovely poetry of every type and on every subject which I thought would be of interest to children. The youngsters and I were strangers to each other but we hoped to become friends on the common ground of poetry.

Feeling that for so many children poetry is made hateful, uninteresting and unintelligible, my first move was to find out what these children thought of poetry. My objective for this lesson was to make the children realize that if you have a song in your soul, you may put it into words and write poetry, or you may appreciate others' songs and your appreciation may be creative.

The children seemed receptive. They were ready to see what I had to offer. I told them I would put a word on the board and that the moment this word found an echo in their minds, and they thought of some idea, some word, or had some feeling about this word which I would presently write, they were to say it right out and I would try to copy their suggestions down as rapidly as possible.

I turned to the board and wrote this word: POETRY, and turned back to the class. There was no instant response. This word as something to think and feel about was really a bit strange to them. Also, they did not know me and perhaps were a bit hesitant about expressing their ideas to me. However, they soon started and these were the reactions I received from this unmotivated class:

rhyme	picture words
song	verse
poetic	imagination
words	singing words†
poem	color words†

The last two suggestions (†) came from me, but the class seemed fully in accord. Perhaps they had that feeling about poetry but did not know that words could be called "color" words or "singing" words. The next complete idea I tried to convey to the children was that poetry is song in words. There wasn't much discussion because in this first lesson I wished to create the atmosphere and set the scene, give them a new idea and a new feeling about poetry.

There were two boys in the class who were quite unsympathetic. The whole procedure seemed to them ridiculous. (These two boys later joined a creative writing class and did some fine work.) Most of the girls were eager, some doubtful, others willing to be impressed.

These two half scoffing boys gave me my next cue. I intimated that not everyone likes poetry or poetry of all kinds. Some find it dull, unnecessary, not alive, rather silly. I then introduced them to THIS SINGING WORLD by Louis Untermeyer. I held the book up, wrote the title on the board and told them what an anthology is. Then I read to them Louis Untermeyer's foreword in the book in which he tells children of the many delights they may find in poetry and of the many kinds of poetry there are. I emphasized the fact that this poetry was modern, written for us, not for children and adults of long ago. I also stressed the fact that if the poem were one they liked, if the poem secured a responsive echo in each of them, they would understand the poem and would need no further explanation of it.

Right here the children were given my

\*Given September 26, 1930 in the seventh grade, Frederic Burk School, San Francisco, California.

conception of poetry. Poetry is a complete cycle. A poet has a thought or feeling or idea which any of you may have. He writes his thought in a poem. That is only half the story, that is only part of poetry. Then you find the poem, tucked away in a book. You read it and enjoy it. That is three quarters of poetry. Then you say, "That's a lovely poem" or you write another poem which expresses your feeling after reading the first poem, or you write a letter to a friend, or just a little composition for yourself or your teacher. You may even get away by yourself in a corner and think about it. That completes the cycle. That is poetry. When you hear a poem and it creates no such response in you, you don't like that poem, you are not ready for it, it is not your poem, you cannot enjoy it, you need not struggle with it. Some day you'll come back to it and find something lovely in it, or you may never really enjoy this poem at all.

With that idea of poetry in mind, I offered to read a few poems which the children might judge. They were free to like or dislike them as they pleased. Any in the room who disliked poetry and did not wish to listen to it could be excused. No one left the room, but the scoffers still disbelieved.

I then read three poems, allowing for spontaneous comments after each one. Usually one or two expressed a feeling or thought inspired by the poem. There was no question in the children's minds about the meaning of any of these, although they had never heard them before. The poems were: "Piping Down the Valleys Wild" by William Blake, "Gaelic Lullaby," author unknown, and "The Lamb" by William Blake.

I dwelt longer on the old Gaelic Lullaby, pointing out that whereas the poet was forgotten and surely dead for many, many years, his poem was still alive and still had power to move. When we came to the second poem by William Blake, the children were more eagerly expectant. They had already learned something of William Blake from "Piping Down the Valleys Wild". Would he be the

same poet?

Let me digress for a moment here to say that the attention of the children was poised, concentrated intensely on me and on the subject. There was hardly a sound in the room during the reading, just a soft murmuring afterward and during the creative writing the silence was almost alive. It was alive, for each child was recreating. That is my aim in teaching appreciation of poetry.

Before I started the lesson I had placed a nice white sheet in front of each child and made sure that each child had a pencil right at hand. I mentioned rather casually that so many of our best ideas and most glorious thoughts die an ignominious death merely for lack of a pencil and a sheet of paper.

Now when I had finished the reading of the three poems, I suggested that just this once, instead of talking, each one write his own impression on the sheet of paper in front of him, so that each thought might be noted down.

They had about ten minutes. They wrote, and again I must state that the silence was impressive.

This is what they wrote. I quote every one. You judge whether I achieved my aim in this lesson. The following are copied exactly, errors and all.

"This poem ('Lullaby') gave me thoughts about the waves dashing against the shore and about the sister driving the cows home and the rain dashing against the window, while all the while the baby slept peacefully at home."

"There are some kinds of poetry I like, but very few. Poems such as 'The Bare-footed Boy' I like. My opinion of that poem is that the man who wrote it was a man who understood boys and understood the wild life."

"I do not know why I dislike poetry. But I would rather be out playing tennis, basketball or swimming. Whenever I am reading a book and come to poetry, I skip it. I don't see any sense in it at all."

"They could leave all the 'thees' and



'thous' and 'thys' out and put action in them."

"I like 'The Lamb' because it gave me something. I could see the lamb with his white curly wool. I also liked 'Piping Down the Valley Wild.' I could see the little boy on the clouds and the piper. I could hear the pipers song and I also could see the piper writing with a reed on the water still."

"Poetry has something in it that makes me want to write or draw or sometimes sing. My two favorite poems are 'The Ocean Tramp' whom I don't know who it is by, and the other is 'An Incedent In a French Camp' by Robert Browning. When I am reading a story I can first see the characters, in fact one time I almost started to talk about knowing them."

"I like poetry because it tells more than compositions do, it has rhythem. Poetry is beautiful, it shows imagination. I like Eugene Field's poems very much."

"The poem 'Piping Down the Valleys Wild' by William Blake made me want to draw a picture of it."

"When the author thought the child on the cloud was telling him to write, he sat down and wrote. All of the poem seemed real and that there was really a child on the cloud. It was imaginary, yet real."

"This is a very picturesque poem and if a person who has a imagination. They would be able to see the child riding on a cloud and telling the man to write a song and this shows that if you have a pencil and paper near, you will be able to write your thought down."

"I like poetry when it has a feeling or a thought that is brought out in the poem.

I liked 'Lullaby' because it brought a feeling of an unknown man's thoughts to life even if he mabey is dead. I liked 'The Lamb' because it brought his feeling about the lamb and God."

"In 'Lullaby' you can see the baby sleeping and father working and brother walking along the shore. You can see the wind roaring and the waves in the ocean and baby sleeping."

"We had these three poems today. I enjoyed them very much. They make you think of things that you would never think of if you did not hear a poem."

"I liked the poem named 'Piping Down the Valleys Wild' by William Blake. Because you can imagion it is really true it is a lovely poem to draw a picture about."

"The other day the teacher asked us to write a composition on 'A Halloween Scare'. I started the first line and a thought came to me to write a simple poem. When that poem 'Piping Down the Valley' was read to us today it gave me a feeling. I could almost see the little boy in the clouds and the piper piping, singing and writing."

"I like 'Piping Down the Valleys Wild' because it was musical. I can picture a piper sitting on a hillock piping out his song of joy and the child sitting on a cloud and telling him to write."

As we read these, we find that most of the children liked the first poem, "Piping Down the Valleys Wild" best. Wouldn't you? They did understand each poem. It was not at all necessary to pull them apart so that the children might understand the words. They got the feeling. That is sufficient. I find each expression individual and original.

# Language as Behavior

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(Concluded from January)

THAT we may see how thoroughly and eminently practical language is, whether oral or written, let us visualize John Homo, now a youth or a man, employing language in the ordinary usual business of living. Under what circumstances, in what situations does he use language? In his home, in his business, in his recreational life, in his clubs and organizations, in his civic relationships, in the casual street and street-car intercourse, in virtually all the social circumstances of his existence—and in practically no other!<sup>1</sup> And for what motives does he use language? Ignoring such general motives as the desire to express himself and to communicate with others, the motives that seem to urge John to use language are as follows: (I list also the types of language activity corresponding to these motives)

## *Motives for Speech*

1. To entertain: conversation, stories, certain kinds of speeches
2. To produce desirable social relations: explanations, discussions, the "social" types
3. To instruct, to tell others that which we know, that which they do not know but wish to know: explanations, certain kinds of stories
4. To reach a decision, to make plans or take counsel together: discussion
5. To persuade others to our way of thinking: argument, speech-making
6. To render accounts of work done: reports
7. To spread news: announcements

<sup>1</sup>This is treated more fully in my *NEW DEMOCRACY IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH*, Chicago, 1925, and also in the chapter on Language in Burton's collaborative book, *SUPERVISION IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL*, D. Appleton, 1929.

8. To carry on business and other co-operative enterprises: discussion, explanation, the business types (There are, of course, highly technical types of language used in business not here listed.)
9. To carry on clubs and organizations: discussion, explanations, speeches, the parliamentary types.

## *Motives for Written Language*

1. To preserve for future use: notes, legal forms, memoranda, diaries
2. To communicate with people at a distance: letters, telegrams
3. To reach a wider audience: all types, when printed or mimeographed
4. To make communication more formal: invitations, formal notes, petitions
5. To guide one's oral language: notes, outlines, memoranda, etc.
6. To make communication more accurate or effective: as when one, wishing to express his ideas with extreme care, writes them out, then reads aloud or else commits to memory and speaks
7. To present material for close study: as when one writes outlines, statements on a blackboard or has them mimeographed and distributed
8. To spread news: notices, orders, new types
9. To communicate less openly when in a group: notes, examinations

The mere enumeration of these motives shows the indubitable social, "behavior" nature of language.

### *Language and Thinking*

I have left myself little time in which to discuss what is, obviously, a very important aspect of my whole problem: the relationship between language and thinking. This is the more important because, whether it is clearly realized or not, one's concept of the nature and function of language and the method by which it should be taught depends upon whether one regards language as primarily an "outer" act, an overt activity, a mode of social behavior, or whether he regards it as primarily an inner, "implicit" intellectual process, a precursor or accompaniment of cerebration, a mode of individual thinking.

Without entering into a discussion of the nature of thought let us accept Dewey's statement: "Thinking begins in what may fairly enough be called a *forked-road* situation, a situation which is ambiguous, which presents a dilemma, which proposes alternatives." (1) Psychologically, the basis of thinking is ideas. But an idea is, in its elemental form, an image. (The root-meaning of *idea* is derived from the Greek *idein*, a verb meaning *to see*.) Images, however, may be not only of things seen, they are the memory-remains of all types of sensations and experiences: sight, sound, taste, smell, muscular, kinaesthetic, and glandular experiences, everything which has made a deep enough "impression" upon the mind, whether by its vividness or by its frequency of repetition, to be remembered and recalled. We think, therefore, when, coming square up against one of these forked-road situations, we put our image-ideas together in some relationship to make a choice as to which of the roads to take. This is a very inadequate explanation of the process, but let it suffice for our purpose.

Biologically, the human being (the John Homo of our acquaintance) is organized for action, for bodily, physical action. A stimulus strikes him, he reacts. The stimulus may be something recalled; no matter, it is a stimulus and it prompts him to action, to

movement. Biologically, the words "stimulus-response" constitute one of the most significant phrases ever spoken. Now, unless, in his long ascent from animalism, something has happened to man to alter radically and basically his biological nature, thinking must have only one function: it must exist in order to assist in the adequacy and effectiveness of this stimulus-response process. Thinking, biologically, can never be an end in itself, it is but a means toward more desirable activity. *Thought is an intermediary between stimulus and response*, between a situation and the consequent activity.

Let us trace (again by reference to John Homo and his experiences with the ball) the relationship between activity and thought and the relationship between them both and speech.

When the rubber ball is placed in John's hands, that stimulus causes a reaction: John responds by manipulating the ball. Among other responses that he makes, he squeezes it: a reflex action. It whistles, he hears the sound. At first he probably detects no connection between his squeezing the ball and the sound it emits. Here, now, are three stimuli, three sensations: the feel of the ball in his hands, the muscular sensations of squeezing it, and the sound he hears. When, after few or many "bouts" with the ball, John squeezes the ball *in order* to hear that shrill, squeaky sound, John *thinks*; he sees a relationship between his ideas (images). And this thinking expedites, facilitates his action, makes his response quicker, more certain, more adequate.

John drops his ball to the floor of the crib. He doesn't know how to get it. In his confusion, he accidentally falls down to the floor of the crib himself: lo and behold! he can now get his ball. After a number of such experiences, John learns, when his ball falls from his hand, to fall down himself and retrieve the ball. *He is thinking* again. And when, later on, he learns to *reach* down his arm and get the ball, he is doing some more thinking.

And then the ball drops outside the crib—disappears from sight. But John has an image, a number of images of the ball in his mind. Those images are so vivid and attractive to John that he wants that ball back. He yells (because it is his “nature” to cry when things go wrong) lustily; his mother runs into the room, sees that the ball John has been playing with has fallen to the floor, picks it up and restores it to him. And again, after few or many of such experiences, John does another job of thinking: he sees the relationship between his yelling and the restoring of his ball. This time he has come pretty close to the forked-road type of thinking: he has come up against a situation where he must make a choice as to what to do, and through relating his ideas, he has made a decision. (Undoubtedly, I am oversimplifying the matter and am attributing to John too much conscious purpose and intent.)

Now in all this there are the beginnings of thought. And, be it noted, up to this point there is no language, at least no conscious “social” language. But in the meantime (by the process described earlier in this paper) John has learned to say *ball*. In doing this he is doing no more than using his vocal muscles to articulate the word, just as he uses his hand muscles to squeeze the ball. Now when the ball falls to the floor, he says *ball*. And this, I believe, is the first time John has definitely employed language as an instrument of thought and, at the same time, as a substitute for action.

Obviously, thinking has taken place in the previous situations without language. We think with our ideas, our images: language merely *names* our ideas, thus enabling us to make our thoughts known more clearly and precisely to others. Or, to put it on other terms, language is simply another means of enabling us to act. Instead of reaching, instead of yelling, John now says *ball*. Language is activity, which is at once a response to a stimulus and a stimulus which causes another person to do something.—And we are back again to Emerson’s statement: “Words

are a kind of action, and action a kind of words.”

Of course, words clarify our thoughts: any pointed, purposeful action clarifies our thoughts—thoughts are vague, cloudy, nebulous until uttered, or “outered.” This is true because thinking is never an end in itself. A person (our John Homo, for example) when he is trying to decide what word to use in a certain sentence, is thinking in exactly the same way as when he is trying to decide which neck-tie to put on or which fist to use in hitting another fellow; and if he uses language to ask advice of some one, he is using language to help himself toward a successful act.

A word is an act, usually accompanied by thought—even as acts are accompanied by thought. If we wish to train a person in thinking, we can do so by training him in language—even as we can train him in thinking by training him in any other kind of thoughtful activity. But it is, finally, the activity itself that is significant. If you want to train a person to think, train him to re-act thoughtfully to stimuli and situations: *inner thinking* is “muffled” so to speak, it is vacuous, “vacuum-ized,” “unbiological.” What happens when a human being permits thinking to take the place of acting can be seen in the case of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. And what happens when language is connected up with thinking instead of with activity can be seen in the case of almost any child, almost every day, in almost every classroom.

Language, whether spoken or written, is an eminently practical, physical kind of behavior, employing and involving thought in the same manner in which it is employed and involved in other types of behavior: playing golf or driving an automobile. If language seems more closely related to thought than to other forms of human behavior, it is because language is particularly a “handy” kind of activity, convenient, “neat,” easily manipulated, apparently welded and wedded more indissolubly to thought than our other



# Editorial

## AIDS TO CREATIVE WRITING

**L**ANGUAGE should be valued and evaluated with reference to its practical, social outcome. . . It is no mystic, mysterious cult or fine art, to be held apart from the usual daily work and play of life. . ." writes Dr. Barnes in the concluding paragraph of his excellent discussion of "Language as Behavior." (See *THE REVIEW* for December, 1930, January, 1931, and page 44 of this issue.)

Yet for how long has creative language been regarded as a "mystic, mysterious cult"? Only in recent years, through the efforts of such teachers as H. Caldwell Cook and Hughes Mearns, and through the productions of young poets like Nathalia Crane and Hilda Conkling, has this idea been dispelled, and teachers brought to recognize that most children are sensitive to beauty, and eager, if given favorable opportunity, to communicate their pleasure to others—in short, that most children are poets.

In refusing to regard poetry as something mysterious, the writers in this issue of *THE REVIEW* have arrived at certain principles which seem to govern the production of creative work. Although their work has been carried on in widely separated parts of the country, they are in accord on certain points.

Each of them, in the first place, understands children. Each is quickly responsive to children's moods, their efforts, and their difficulties. Each realizes that sympathy must dispell the shyness and fear of ridicule that manacle old and young alike. Mrs. Millard (see page 33) cites a case in point.

To the pupil's freedom from fear of ridicule, and confidence that his efforts will be regarded sympathetically, must be added a stimulating environment. Miss Parkinson says, (page 27) "An environment of freedom

gives opportunity for the rich creative development of the individual. . . The teacher's part in this development is to put the child in contact with beauty and guide his sensitiveness to the beautiful." A number of teachers bring their pupils into such "contact with beauty" through the reading of poetry. Miss Kinsey, Mrs. Bailey, and Miss La Rue (see pages 35, 41, and 30) each speaks definitely of reading much poetry aloud to her classes. In this way, children are not only made familiar with poetic form, but are stimulated, by the teacher's evident enthusiasm, to imitation.

The social spirit of the group seems to be a powerful factor in the creation of poetry. Miss Rainwater, (page 37) tells us that her fifth grade wrote a poem as an expression of friendliness for a second grade. (She makes the amusing comment that the fifth graders rejected the suggestion that they write a play, because they felt that the second grade would not understand such mature expression. Poetry was agreed upon, however, as common ground!) Miss La Rue's class produced "The Turned-Into-Outs" as a group. This composition, written by a second grade, is eloquent of the potentialities of group spirit.

Both Miss Kinsey and Mrs. Millard point out that good creative work is not the exclusive production of the very bright students. Children who are regarded as dull write some very good verse.

In the matter of rhythm and rhyme there seems to be a feeling that rhyme should not be stressed. Miss Parkinson writes, "Rhyme comes naturally. . . Not much rhyme will come naturally in grades one and two. . ." Miss Kinsey goes further. "Rhyme should

be discouraged rather than stressed," she writes, "as it seriously hampers free expression."

Not even the most successful teacher of creative writing would suppose that much of the verse written in elementary schools will survive. But, how many of the millions of "themes" written every year on traditional

subjects are immortal? The permanency of such productions has nothing to do with their value. Most of the poetry written by children is sincere; much of it is spontaneous; and all of it is social, for even the halting verses of the poorest rhymster are attempts to communicate pleasure, enjoyment, and a sense of beauty.

### LANGUAGE AS BEHAVIOR

(Continued from page 46)

activities. If the tongue is mightier than the sword (which I sometimes doubt—I suspect that proverb was made by a "tongues-man" rather than a swordsman), it is merely because the tongue is a sharper, keener, handier weapon for the mind—the mind can grasp it more tightly, so to speak, wield it more readily; but lunging with the sword and thrusting with the tongue are both, nevertheless, no more than forms of behavior. Probably actions always speak louder than words because the forms are more violent.

#### Conclusion

Language is a type of human behavior, a kind of social activity, to be learned and to be engaged in precisely as other types of behavior, other kinds of conduct. Closely

and intricately connected with thinking though it is, it is nevertheless to be regarded as an activity, immediately practical, eminently useful. It is not to be learned and practiced *in cameo, in vacuo*, isolated from the common, normal situations and circumstances of life; it is not to be too much "prepared for," with preliminary drill and long-drawn out grammar and rhetoric exercises; it is not to be tied up too closely with logical thought-processes. Language should be valued and evaluated with reference to its practical, social outcomes, the obtaining of results, the securing of effects. It is no mystic, mysterious cult or fine art, to be held apart from the usual daily work and play of life: it is a set of behavior patterns, of customs, closely akin to all the other acts and activities that make up human existence.

### CREATIVE EXPRESSION THROUGH POETIC LANGUAGE

(Continued from page 29)

Come to our garden today with me,  
It is a beautiful spot to see,  
The warm sun shines in the clear blue sky,  
And the air is fresh when it blows by.

Come to our garden today with me,  
It is a beautiful spot to see,  
The ground, the sun, the birds, the bees,  
The soft, warm air and the waving trees.

Come to our garden today with me,  
It is a beautiful spot to see,  
I love to go to the garden fair,  
Would you love to go with me there?

Because this appreciation has opened so beautifully the door of the child's world, it will surely lead him and guide him through the door that opens into the "Great Society."